



BUREAUS

ATLANTA Jim Newton, Chief, 1350 Spring St., N.W., Atlanta, Ga. 30367, Telephone (404) 898-7522
DALLAS Thomas J. Brannon, Chief, 333 N. Washington, Dallas, Texas, 75246-1798, Telephone (214) 828-5100
NASHVILLE (Baptist Sunday School Board) Lloyd T. Householder, Chief, 127 Ninth Ave., N., Nashville, Tenn. 37234, Telephone (615) 251-2300
RICHMOND (Foreign) Robert L. Stanley, Chief, 3806 Monument Ave., Richmond, Va., 23230, Telephone (804) 353-0151
WASHINGTON Chief, 200 Maryland Ave., N.E., Washington, D.C. 20002, Telephone (202) 544-4226

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Baptist workers, other Mideast
evacuees listen, wait in Cyprus

By Mike Creswell

N.F.M.B.

LARNACA, Cyprus (BP)--Southern Baptist representatives who evacuated to Cyprus from Jordan and Israel just ahead of the Gulf war are waiting and praying for news that they will be able to return to their ministries.

So are representatives of a number of other Christian groups with ministries in the region.

"I don't think we're talking about a long-term evacuation," said David Smith, a Southern Baptist worker who evacuated from Israel with his wife and two children.

Smith, of Birmingham, Ala., said he and others wake up in the middle of the night to listen to reports of missile attacks on Israel and other events influencing their friends and co-workers.

"I've never listened to the news so frequently before," he said.

The evacuation of Southern Baptist personnel from several Middle Eastern countries because of the Gulf war already has cost "tens of thousands of dollars" in transportation and housing, reported Dale Thorne, area director in the region for the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board.

Some families have gone to the United States; others went to temporary living quarters in Cyprus or Egypt. The evacuees have left behind their homes and most of their personal property for an unknown period of time.

Sissy Rogerson, of Georgetown, S.C., has left even more: her husband, Sonny, has remained in Jerusalem. They have no way to know how long they will be separated.

For the seven school-age Southern Baptist children who just arrived in Cyprus, evacuation has not meant a long vacation from school. They attend a temporary school set up in a Church of the Nazarene office.

"What a blessing that the Nazarenes have a room and are letting us use it," said Southern Baptist worker Eddie Fields, who organized the school effort.

The mission organization Youth With a Mission, which has an office in Cyprus, has provided textbooks, said Fields. An Anglican woman has offered to help transport the children or even sew clothes.

"There's a real sense of unity," Fields said of the school, which has 13 students.

Four children of Lindell and Kay Browning are included among the students.

He is mission director for the eastern Mediterranean area for the Church of the Nazarene in the United States, and has provided his building for the school. Browning is the school's counselor and leads students in daily devotionals.

"We feel the Lord has worked this out. Kids need a regular program," he said. The Brownings evacuated Jan. 12 from Beit Safafa, a Palestinian village south of Jerusalem near Bethlehem.

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Like others, the Brownings follow news of the Gulf war closely and keep in touch with Nazarene leaders by telephone calls and fax messages.

"We've been concerned about our Arab pastors, especially ones with small children," he said, describing how one pastor had to put his 1-year-old baby in a gas-proof, sealed bassinet when air raid sirens sounded in Israel. "The child was very upset and yet the parents couldn't even touch her."

The mission group Interserve also has pulled personnel out of some countries and moved others to safer locations, said Jim Tebbe, a regional director for the group based in Cyprus.

More than 400 Interserve personnel work in more than a dozen countries, many in north Africa and the Middle East. Like many others, Tebbe believes the war has had major impact on Christian mission work and could be severe if it widens and draws in other countries.

Similar concerns were expressed by Doug Clark, area director in the Middle East and North Africa area for the Assemblies of God, based in Nicosia, Cyprus.

Like Southern Baptists, some Assemblies personnel have evacuated from the region while others have remained. Some evacuees are waiting out the war in Cyprus. The Assemblies have about 35 families or individuals working throughout the region, most of them in Egypt.

"We've tried to look at each individual family situation," said Clark. "We pulled our first couple from Jordan about five days before the U.N. deadline. Several families from Israel were already out for the Christmas holidays. We strongly discouraged them from returning. Several other families in Israel decided to leave. We still have three families in Israel."

The Assemblies office encouraged one single worker to leave Pakistan, where a Muslim leader had called for death to foreigners. "There's an anti-foreigner, anti-American and anti-Christian feeling growing there," he said, adding that some Christian workers had been personally threatened.

Still, Assemblies personnel have felt frustrated at pressures to leave, Clark said. Some feel heavy news coverage on the war overly influenced people back home to call for their immediate removal.

"They're asking me why should our missionary call and vision be squeezed down into 20 diagonal inches and filtered through the editorial view of Cable News Network," Clark said.

In one country where Saddam Hussein has wide support, Clark said, male mission workers hesitate to go on the streets. Even some national members of assemblies churches have been pro-Iraq, Pro-Hussein and anti-American, he said.

"The big question is how the national church will receive American workers back after this is over, especially if Iraq is devastated and Saddam Hussein killed. Where do we go from here? I don't think anyone has the answer," he said. "I think it will take the work of the Holy Spirit to heal the wounds almost certain to come out of this conflict, especially the breach between American missionaries and national believers from a Palestinian background."

Merrill Morrow and his wife are among Interserve personnel who have evacuated to Cyprus. Morrow has served as pastor of the Amman International Church in Amman, Jordan, for the past two years. The church meets in the auditorium of Amman Baptist School, which is sponsored by Southern Baptists.

Some Southern Baptist personnel also have helped with the congregation. "We weren't keen to leave," said Morrow, a Presbyterian from Northern Ireland, "as I think is the situation with most people."

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He acknowledges his ministry would have been "so limited as to be virtually nonexistent" in the current situation. But leaving has been hard. "No matter how hard you try to say it nicely or explain it, the shepherd has left the flock. And that's hard to take, hard to deal with emotionally," he said.

Southern Baptists acknowledge similar feelings. Worker Roger Wall said first felt anger that outside events were interrupting his ministry in Jordan. But the overriding feeling, several said, has been grief at the separation.

"Our workers have deeply invested of themselves in ministry. That's the reason grief is profound," said Eddie Fields. "I think when anyone invests themselves like this, the flip side is it's going to hurt when they leave."

Fields also said the workers are getting forceful reminders of their American nationality. "We're Christians, yet we're looked at as Americans. Our passports aren't going to change just because we love Jesus," she said.

Ironically, the new Southern Baptist evacuees join 10 other Southern Baptist couples based in Cyprus, about half of whom evacuated in February and March of 1987 from Lebanon.

Almost four years later, Americans still are not able to return to Lebanon because of the violence that has ripped the country. The American government has forbidden Americans with U.S. passports to travel in Lebanon.

For the latest Southern Baptist evacuees, the Lebanon workers are a visible reminder that evacuations can become a long-term proposition.

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Richmond bureau of Baptist Press

Volunteers head overseas
despite terrorism threats

By Mary E. Speidel

N FMB

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RICHMOND, Va. (BP)--As Americans abroad face growing terrorism threats, "life must go on" is the attitude of most Southern Baptist volunteers headed overseas.

Since the Persian Gulf war erupted Jan. 17, Iraq has continued to call for "holy war" against the West and threaten terrorist acts against Americans. The U.S. State Department has issued a travel advisory warning Americans abroad to "be aware of the threat of terrorist actions against U.S. citizens or property in other locations worldwide." The advisory gives specific warnings for Europe, north Africa, the Persian Gulf region and south Asia.

Team leaders and individual volunteers are making their own decisions about travel, said Ron Boswell, director of the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board's volunteer department. Some have pulled out, but others kept their plans to participate in various projects around the world.

"We've also promised volunteers we would inform them if there were any late-breaking situations they should know about," said Boswell. Most have shown an attitude of "life must go on," he added.

Because of the Gulf war, volunteer projects in the Middle East remain on hold, according to Foreign Mission Board officials. They have notified volunteers of the travel advisory and have highlighted the "war exclusion" as it relates to terrorism in insurance policies volunteers are required to buy.

Volunteers normally pay \$1.60 per day for substantial accidental death and disability benefits. But under a "war exclusion" they or their families might receive nothing if they fall victim to Iraqi-sponsored terrorism. An unofficial interpretation from A.I. Global insurance company stated that if it can be proven a terrorist act was performed by a government which is at war, it would be considered an act of war under the war exclusion.

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Accidental death insurance benefits for career missionaries also are excluded in acts of war, but the Foreign Mission Board self-insures each career missionary for \$100,000 in life insurance benefits through its own risk-management funds. This insurance would be unaffected under the circumstances, said Gerald Burch, associate vice president for overseas financial services.

One Oklahoma volunteer said he felt he was more likely to be hit by a car in his own hometown than to be harmed by terrorist activity abroad. "I have to go ahead with my life," the volunteer told Boswell. "I have to do what the Lord wants me to do."

After learning about potential terrorism, volunteer Greg McKeever said he reconsidered his decision to spend six months as a volunteer in Western Europe. "It really tested me," admitted McKeever, of Waxahachie, Texas.

But as he prayed about the matter, McKeever said he felt God wanted him to stick with his original decision. "One of the things God has taught me through this is that whenever he leads me to do something, then no matter what the ramifications are, I have to follow," he said.

McKeever admitted terrorism concerned him but planned to leave on schedule Jan. 25. "We're all human," he said. "We may worry and fret on the outside, but down inside you have a peace and you know what you're supposed to do."

Another volunteer team from Texas and Oklahoma plans to go ahead with a European project in February. Team leader Bob Eklund said State Department and airline officials assured him the country they will visit is among the safest of all European countries now. "There's never been any real thought of our not going unless we were told it was too dangerous to go," said Eklund, director of stewardship at the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Some volunteers have decided to postpone projects to a later date, board officials said.

Medical volunteers from North Carolina postponed a January project in Poland, said Dewey Merritt, associate in the volunteer department. The team of six was to have surveyed possibilities for a medical exchange with North Carolina Baptist medical volunteers and Polish physicians. Because of travel advisories, they felt it would be better to go later, Merritt said. North Carolina Baptists have a partnership evangelism project with Poland.

Eight volunteers from Green Acres Baptist Church in Tyler, Texas, have postponed a trip to Nicaragua until March. They were to have done construction and medical work in Nicaragua Jan. 17-24. They decided to delay the trip because of the Persian Gulf situation, said a church staff member.

One volunteer from Alabama canceled a trip to Chile because he expects to be called up for reserve duty in the Persian Gulf. The volunteer was to have done construction work in Temuco, Chile, in February.

But several other volunteer groups proceeded with planned overseas projects after the war started. Boswell said the number of recent trip postponements weren't much different from routine changes in plans made by volunteers under normal circumstances.

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Marty Croll of the Foreign Mission Board contributed to this story.

Maryland church sponsors
sanctity of life seminar

By Tom Strobe

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GLEN BURNIE, Md. (BP)--A Maryland church took the Southern Baptist emphasis on sanctity of human life and turned it into an outreach that stretched beyond its membership into three states and the District of Columbia.

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Glen Burnie Baptist Church, located south of Baltimore, sponsored a sanctity of life seminar Jan. 19. The Southern Baptist Convention observed Sanctity of Human Life Sunday the following day.

The seeds for Glen Burnie's creative approach were sown during a conversation among Woods Culpepper, the church's minister of education and outreach, and some friends. His question: How can our church make Sanctity of Human Life Sunday into an emphasis that equips members and changes lives?

The result was a seminar that trained participants to combat abortion and minister to its victims as well as have an impact in the lives of those touched by AIDS, sexual and physical abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, homelessness and hunger. Sessions educated, motivated and prepared Christians in each of these areas.

One-hundred sixty-eight people registered, including members of about 10 Southern Baptist and 15 non-SBC churches from Delaware, Maryland, Virginia and Washington, Culpepper said.

The seminar fulfilled its purpose, he said. "A lot of eyes were opened. We cannot tell people to minister without giving them tools."

One of those who helped equip participants was Terry Rubley, Maryland director of Women Exploited By Abortion. After the session she said evangelical churches have made some progress in the last five years in ministering to post-abortion women.

"For aborted women, there has been the least amount of ministry and coverage," she said of the pro-life outreach of churches. "I think we're just at the tip of the iceberg of healing hurt. I think the church is still waking up to this issue."

The post-abortion woman is "a hidden tragedy" in the evangelical church, Rubley said. The number of such women in churches is "awesome," she added.

Rubley shared with her seminar group she had made a profession of faith in Christ as a young girl but had three abortions by the time she was in her early 20s. Soon thereafter, God did a work of renewal and restoration in her life that began the healing process. She said abortion not only can cause physical problems but a destructive psychological pattern of guilt, grief, denial, depression and bitterness. Churches can help post-abortion women by hosting speakers who have been healed by God after their own abortions, she said.

"The only thing that will cause a spark to get them to turn is to have someone who will not condemn them and will love them," said the mother of three living children.

Lovingkindness, not judgment, also is crucial in ministering amid the AIDS epidemic, said Eric Hoheisel, executive manager of Love and Action. Hoheisel led a session on the church's response to AIDS. Love and Action, based in Annapolis, Md., is a Christian ministry to people who have AIDS or who are HIV-positive.

"Our churches need to be places where people find forgiveness, restoration and hope," he said. "They need to be those places, and they're not right now."

Many church members have the same emotional responses to AIDS as do persons with the disease -- fear, anger and denial, Hoheisel said, adding, those reactions are only manifested differently.

"It's not just the people that have AIDS that need compassion and understanding," Hoheisel said. "It's the people in our churches who have the fears and the anxiety and the judgment."

Churches need to have a gracious balance in the way that they approach AIDS and those who have it, he said.

"The church always wants to be right ... ," Hoheisel said. "We have to take this moral high ground, so our society doesn't crumble around us. That's very important.

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"We need to have a compassionate response and still stand on the word of God as being truth. It's a difficult place to walk. I think Christ can shine out all the brighter if we can walk that line.

"I think (AIDS) is one of the greatest opportunities for Christian witness that we've had in this century," Hoheisel said.

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Clergy malpractice case
dismissed by Ohio court

By Larry Chesser

N-CO
BX

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WASHINGTON (BP)--The Supreme Court of Ohio has joined California and other states that recently have rejected so-called "clergy malpractice" lawsuits.

The court's decision, however, leaves open the door for some malpractice claims against clergy.

The state's high court reversed an earlier appeals court ruling and dismissed local, state and national organizations of the Seventh-day Adventist Church from a lawsuit filed by an Ohio couple who attended the Hill Church in Knox County.

In a complaint filed in the Knox County Court of Common Pleas, the plaintiffs alleged malpractice, fraud, intentional infliction of emotional distress and non-consensual sexual conduct on the part of the church's pastor. The lawsuit also named as defendants the Ohio Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Columbia Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

The complaint contended that the church organizations were liable for the pastor's alleged actions based on legal doctrine under which employers may be held responsible for their employee's misconduct. The plaintiffs also alleged the church was negligent in hiring the minister.

The trial court dismissed the case against the Seventh-day Adventist organizations but was reversed by the appeals court, clearing the way for the case against the church organizations to proceed to trial. The churches then appealed to the Supreme Court, which dismissed the complaint against them.

Before it could decide the church groups' request to be dismissed from the suit, the Supreme Court said it first had to determine whether the plaintiffs could bring a clergy malpractice claim against the minister. The lawsuit against the minister is pending in the trial court.

In holding there was no basis for a clergy malpractice claim against either the minister or the church groups, the court cited a previous Ohio case that bars malpractice claims when plaintiffs can seek redress through established legal theories such as fraud, duress or assault.

The ruling left open the possibility, however, that clergy malpractice claims may be pursued when no other legal options are available to plaintiffs. The court defined malpractice "as the failure to exercise the degree of care and skill normally exercised by members of the clergy in carrying out their professional duties."

Addressing the question of the church's liability as employer of the pastor, the court held that a church or other organization is not liable for an employee's intentional misconduct or other actions outside the "scope of employment."

"The Seventh-day Adventist organization in no way promotes or advocates non-consensual sexual conduct between pastors and parishioners," the court said. The ruling said the church did not hire the minister to rape or assault members and that the plaintiffs alleged no specific fact showing the church groups reasonably could have foreseen the alleged misconduct."

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The court also dismissed the negligent hiring complaint, noting that the plaintiffs failed to present facts that indicated "the individual hired had a past history of criminal, tortious or otherwise dangerous conduct about which the religious institution knew or could have discovered through a reasonable investigation."

Several religious groups, including the Baptist Joint Committee, the American Jewish Congress, the National Association of Evangelicals and the National Council of Churches, filed a friend-of-the-court brief urging Ohio's highest court to reverse the appeals court.

"The case is a win for religious liberty, but it's unfortunate the Ohio Supreme Court didn't slam the door on this misbegotten theory of clergy malpractice once and for all. If a painter rapes a woman, we call it rape -- not 'painter malpractice,'" said BJC General Counsel Oliver Thomas.

"While the Ohio court dismissed the claim against the church based on the minister's alleged sexual misconduct, churches should be aware that they could be held liable in such cases, particularly if the minister has a history of misconduct. Conversely, a church could be held liable for failure to warn if it concealed information about a minister's past misconduct to an inquiring pulpit committee or other prospective employer," he said.

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Missionary leads ambassadors
to consider higher ideals

By Sarah Zimmerman

F-4/M/S

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ATLANTA (BP)--As the reality of war replaces the ideals of peace, Southern Baptist home missionary Ted Mall points U.N. ambassadors and employees to higher commitments.

"People here think of the United Nations as an organization to promote peace. The war is a setback to their ideals," says Mall, director of Christian Ministries to the United Nations Community.

"My message is we must continue to believe the God we serve is greater than any conflict; that our relationship with him and commitment to him is far more important than our ideals."

Even though the U.N. security council endorsed the resolution approving of force in the Persian Gulf, Malls says "there is the feeling here that, 'We didn't mean for it to be this way.'"

Counseling is the focus of Mall's ministry since war began. He says people in the United Nations need to share their feelings about the war, but they cannot always talk about it openly with other U.N. members.

"A lot of Arab people work at the United Nations," Mall says. "They may or may not agree with their country's actions. People are disenfranchised because of this.

"We keep as neutral as possible. Because of that, we have been able to minister here."

Mall's work is sponsored jointly by the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board and the Baptist Convention of New York.

Each Thursday he leads a Bible study for U.N. delegates and workers. Mall says the day after war began in the Middle East, "people came to the Bible study wanting answers. We had about 18 people, which is a capacity crowd in our office."

The text the group studied that day in the series of lessons from John was about Jesus' promise to send a comforter. Mall says the reminder that "our consolation is in him, not in the world" was a timely message that day.

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Pro-lifers urged to
continue efforts

By Tom Strode

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WASHINGTON (BP)--President George Bush and pro-life leaders challenged more than 25,000 persons gathered here on the 18th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion to persevere in their crusade to protect the unborn.

Traditionally, Jan. 22, the date of the historic Roe v. Wade decision in 1973, is a time for pro-life and pro-choice advocates to hold rallies, press conferences and media events. The centerpiece of the day's activities is the March for Life, which began on the first anniversary of Roe v. Wade.

This year's march had the disadvantage of threats of terrorism in the nation's capital because of war in the Persian Gulf area. Such concern held down the attendance -- "no two ways about it," a March for Life spokesman said. National Park Service police, who said they counted participants as they marched, estimated the crowd at 25,000. Nellie Gray, president of March for Life, said she judged the attendance to be 50,000 from the rally platform.

They cheered when President Bush said in a telephone hookup, " ... I'm pleased that my voice is part of the growing chorus that simply says, 'Choose life.'

"As I look back at past years' Rally for Life, I am encouraged by the progress which has taken place. Attempts by Congress to expand funding, federal funding, for abortions have been defeated, and the Supreme Court has taken welcome steps toward reversing its Roe v. Wade decision.

"Despite these successes, much remains to be done ... ," Bush said. "And you, the thousands of tireless volunteers who have gathered here from across the United States, must make it your goal to keep this issue alive and predominant in the halls of Congress, the courts and in the minds of the American people."

Congressman Robert Dornan, R.-Cal., paralleled the struggle against abortion to the war in the Middle East. He spoke of the United States servicemen who had died or were missing in a "terrible" war and said that there also was a conflict in progress at home.

"The abortionists in this country are perpetrating an American holocaust," Dornan said, "and if we will send our prayers up to God Almighty to save these Americans and to bring an end to the agony of the Iraqi and Kuwaiti people, should we do any less for this unbelievable slaughter of innocent human life? We must end the holocaust."

Earlier in the day, about 20 persons representing pro-life groups met with Vice President Dan Quayle and Chief of Staff John Sununu at the White House. Among the participants was James A. Smith, director of government relations for the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission.

"We were pleased that the vice president and chief of staff promised that the administration would continue its opposition to federal funding of abortion," Smith said, "but some of us were disappointed that similar commitments were not made on an executive order banning fetal tissue experimentation and on other requests made by group members."

A variety of religious and pro-life groups shared the platform at the March for Life rally. Included were the Christian Life Commission, represented by Smith, as well as the Family Research Council, Christian Action Council, National Right to Life Committee, American Life League, Americans United for Life, Operation Rescue, Feminists for Life and Officers for Life. Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox and Jewish leaders also were present.

Southern Baptists were among those who marched from the rally site on the mall up Constitution Avenue to the Supreme Court building.

Twenty-two members of Siloam Baptist Church in Powdersville, S.C., traveled to Washington on a bus for the event, said Michael Cloer, pastor of the church.

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"It's not a commitment to a cause," Cloer said as he marched near the Capitol. "It's a commitment to Christ. He said, 'I came that you might have life,' so every Christian is involved in life, which we believe begins at conception. I believe everything that's going on right now is because of the judgment of God upon us allowing this brutal murder to take place."

Some of the church's members have been involved in Operation Rescue for two years, Cloer said. He pointed to a banner carried by church members quoting Proverbs 24:11 and said, "... it's a command to rescue those that are innocently sentenced to death. So really we don't have much of a choice in it. We're commanded to."

Ron Reese, a layman from Centerville Baptist Church in Centerville, Va., and a member of Southern Baptists for Life of Northern Virginia, said about 50 people from his church attended.

"I know that we're on the Lord's side," Reese said as he helped carry a Southern Baptists for Life sign. "You can't help but be discouraged sometimes when you see the reactions of some of our representatives. ... It's a wonderful thing to meet with other people who are of like mind, and I have not come to one of these things without going away encouraged by the fact that there are so many more out there and that they're peaceful people."

The participants, many carrying signs saying "The Natural Choice Is Life!," passed about 60 members of the National Organization for Women as they marched. The NOW members supported a "Pro-choice Wall of Names," 25 panels of eight feet in height with 25,000 names on them. The names were four percent of the more than 650,000 signatures that have been gathered in support of abortion rights, NOW said.

National Right to Life staff members said in a morning press conference that they were not discouraged about the status of the fight against abortion.

"We've always been very explicit that we don't expect this to be a quickly fought effort," said Susan Smith, NRLC's associate legislative director, "but the pro-life movement has been hanging in there and gaining ground for 18 years, and we anticipate that it's going to be many years to come in our efforts ... to restore legal protection to unborn children."

The Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights unveiled a new booklet, Words of Choice, at another morning press conference. RCAR, consisting of 35 religious groups, said it published the booklet "to demonstrate that word choice used by abortion opponents is often misleading and deceitful."

An example is the booklet's comments on the use by pro-lifers of the term human being: "Such terminology is known as prolepsis, defined as 'an anticipating, especially the describing of an event as if it had already happened,' when in fact it may be months away or it may never happen."

Just as stepping on and crushing an acorn is not the destruction of an oak tree, human cells from the moment of conception are not human beings."